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TELEGRAM

June 23, 2003

To: No Action Addressee
Action: Unknown
From: AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI (ABU DHABI 2985 - PRIORITY)
TAGS: PGOV, PREL
Captions: None
Subject: ABU DHABI CROWN PRINCE BURNISHES LEADERSHIP IMAGE IN
HIGH-PROFILE VISITS TO UK AND FRANCE
Ref: None

C O N F I D E N T I A L ABU DHABI 02985

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CXABU:
ACTION: POL
INFO: AMB DCM P/M ECON RSO

DISSEMINATION: POL
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: AMB:MMWAHBA
DRAFTED: A/DCM:TEWILLIAMS
CLEARED: POL:STWILLIAMS

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FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0558
INFO RUEHZM/GCC COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0687
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0733
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 002985

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARP

NSC FOR PETER THEROUX

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/23/13
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TC](#)
SUBJECT: ABU DHABI CROWN PRINCE BURNISHES
LEADERSHIP IMAGE IN HIGH-PROFILE
VISITS TO UK AND FRANCE

[1](#)1. (U) Classified by Ambassador Marcelle M. Wahba
for reasons 1.5 (B) and (D).

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

[1](#)2. (C) Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince (and de facto

Ruler), Shaykh Khalifa bin Zayid Al-Nahyan, made unusually high-profile visits to the U.K. and France earlier this month in a move clearly intended to establish his credentials as a statesman. The normally quite shy Khalifa, whose primary focus heretofore has been on running Abu Dhabi emirate and managing its prodigious oil wealth, held meetings with Tony Blair, Jacques Chirac and others (including Queen Elizabeth), and issued generally well-received pronouncements on a range of international political issues (Middle East Peace, etc.). Khalifa's European trip received exhaustive coverage in the Emirati press; frequently shown close at his side was Shaykh Muhammad bin Zayid (MBZ), the de facto defense minister and future Abu Dhabi Crown Prince hopeful. U.K. Embassy sources here (protect) say Khalifa's meetings were mostly non-substantive and note that the impressive schedule was largely arranged through MbZ's connections both with HMG and the British Royal Family. Thus, while showing Khalifa as a confident player on a broader international stage may have been the primary purpose of the European trip, a secondary one would appear to have been to demonstrate MBZ's indispensability -- an attribute unlikely to hurt his chances of being selected as the next Abu Dhabi Crown Prince. End Summary and Comment.

Shaykh Khalifa's European (Working) Vacation

13. (C) Abu Dhabi Crown Prince (and de facto ruler) Shaykh Khalifa bin Zayid Al-Nahyan spent the first two weeks of June in Europe, visiting both the U.K. and France. Yet while he routinely takes off the month of June for vacation, the first half of this year's break looked suspiciously like work, with the local UAE press providing front-page coverage of Khalifa's meetings with Princes Andrew and Charles, PM Blair and FM Straw, a reception for officials and businessmen at the tony Lanesborough Hotel (owned by the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority), and a meeting with Queen Elizabeth at Windsor Castle (followed by attendance at the Queen's 50th Coronation Anniversary). Khalifa's Paris schedule appeared to be shorter and less hectic, but here too he kept reasonably busy, meeting with President Chirac, Defense Minister Aliot-Marie, and various government and business types.

Press reports emphasize engagement on substance

14. (C) In an effort to shape the coverage of his trip, Shaykh Khalifa gave a rare interview to the pan-Arab daily Al-Sharq Al-Awsat at the start of his visit to London in which he engaged (for the first time in post's collective memory) on a wide range of international political issues including Iraq, the Middle East Peace Roadmap, and terrorist attacks in Riyadh and Casablanca. He took the even more unusual step of also addressing the UAE's domestic political structure, saying the current set-up provides for the "inclusion of a mechanism for consultations in decision-making." On the role of women in the UAE, he observed that "no amendments to the Constitution are needed to permit women to serve in the Federal National Council." The interview (really more of a statement) was disseminated broadly by the official government Emirates News Agency (WAM). Khalifa's interlocutors appeared equally at pains to give his discussions a statesmanlike cast, with Tony Blair's spokesperson calling their talks "important," and Chirac's media handler noting that Khalifa had

engaged on "a number of military contracts and the quality of the strategic partnership."

ut appearances can be deceptive

15. (C) Yet in contrast to press reporting suggesting Khalifa's meetings were fraught with heavy lifting on the affairs of the day, U.K. embassy officials in Abu Dhabi (protect) have told us privately that while the atmospherics of the Crown Prince's appointments were universally positive, they were also largely unencumbered with substance. Indeed, one U.K. diplomat observed that Khalifa's schedule had largely been orchestrated by younger half-brother Shaykh Muhammad bin Zayid (MbZ), the de facto defense minister, whose personal ties and policy credentials with the U.K. leadership are well established. MBZ reportedly had to push Khalifa to take a more full schedule in Britain (including calls on government officials as opposed to the more typical, and largely ceremonial, meetings with UK royal family members). The net result of MBZ's efforts was that Khalifa came across as confident and statesmanlike, while MbZ once again demonstrated his indispensability.

Wahba